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ABSTRACT

The adult education graduate program at Northern Illinois University began offering courses in 1969. Starting points of a progressive agenda were urban, race, and class. Students, many of whom had experience with the social upheavals of the 1960s, along with community-based organizers and the International Council for Adult Education, pushed the program into a more radical critique. The program gained a department chair who supported change. It became more visible as marginalized persons graduated and entered the field, and the curriculum became more critical, inclusive, and sociological. The program grew quickly from 1976. Believing the program was held hostage by flawed assumptions perpetrated in the late 19th century under the ideal of meritocracy, the chair developed cohort programs with preset curricula, group support, a schedule to accommodate the part-time student, and emphasis on leadership and policy studies. Prior to the cohorts, the adult education faculty had recruited 16 percent marginalized and 15 percent international students among 178 doctoral students; in contrast, the 3 doctoral cohort groups with 87 students had 64 percent from marginalized groups. Clearly, the cohorts were an effective way to recruit marginalized persons. The cohort concept proved to be an appropriate option for democratizing the university and increasing the graduation rate. A next step would be to develop a project that could center and extend the progressive social change agenda. (YLB)

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Ideological Space Makers: The Need in Graduate Programs in Adult Education.

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From our experience of 25 years in developing a graduate program in adult education I want to reflect on the difficulties of our everyday work as ideological space makers within a traditional university located in a conservative political milieu. Not only is the university encapsulated in traditionalism, but almost all adult education programs across the country have promoted professionalism and technique above the progressive concerns of promoting democratic social change. Accordingly, not only did the contextualization of the Northern Illinois University (NIU) graduate program within a traditional institution promote education which reproduced the extant social order but there were no progressive exemplars across the country to follow, as we initiated our work. As Wilson argues, empirical analytical science has been central to the definition and professionalization of the field of American (sic.) adult education since the 1930's (p. 260). This concern for professionalization and the creation of a disciplinary field of adult education led to the forfeiting of the rich historic traditions coming from the roots of social action and social movements in the 1920's. In fact, Wilson (1992) documents the fact that the emancipatory social movement heritage is absent from the "knowledge base" of the decennial handbooks of adult education including the 1934, 1936, 1948, 1960, 1970, and 1990 editions. Accordingly, United States graduate programs which grew up in this same period were concerned with establishing the field, not rocking the boat.

The Northern Illinois Struggle - 1976 forward

We started our graduate program by offering courses in 1969. By 1973, the masters program was approved and the doctoral degree program followed in 1977. There were 6 tenure track faculty in 1978 and 11.5 in 1996, along with 2 adjunct faculty. In May, 1996, there were 387 majors (256 doctoral; 131 masters). A balance of interests has characterized the faculty and in 1976, there were two faculty members and 3 instructors who were interested in a progressive agenda. Our starting points were urban, race and class but we were naive in our analysis. We had a ten year specially funded project which located us on an extended campus: in Chicago. We worked with teachers of poor adults many of whom were African Americans and Latino(a)'s. We, in Chicago, mainly developed our space around community based education and recruitment of African and Latino Americans into graduate study. The critical turn occurred through our students and our experience. Students, many of whom had experience with the social upheavals of the sixties along with community based organizers, and the International Council for Adult Education, pushed us into a more radical critique.

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There was freedom and funds in the first ten years to support progressive students and a Chicago base 65 miles from campus. This maximized our abilities to develop relevant curriculum because we were in daily contact with out larger urban and smaller progressive community on a daily basis. As long as we dealt individually with students and made variations in courses not programs we experienced few problems from the university.

However, several events coincided historically which brought out the guardians of the state: 1) we lost our grant in 1986 because of our community based politics (about $400,000 a year): 2) we gained a department chair who supported change: 3) we began to be more visible as we graduated marginalized persons: and 4) our curriculum was becoming more critical, inclusive and sociological. Our students also became more visible on campus, critiquing women's studies (too Eurocentric), Black Studies (too patriarchal), graduate school (resource allocation issues). The Africentric discourse which united Black Students was considered inappropriate by some university faculty; the African American annual student conference (much like a caucus) was at first criticized by some of our own faculty and later not seen as a priority by most European American adult education faculty and students.

A War of Attrition ensued with the graduate school ostensibly over standards, externalized programs and curricular issues. However, we had externalized the masters programs for our first twelve years with no critique by the Graduate School and we had concrete evidence on our student's scholarly activity which compared favorably with other programs in the university, but these hard data were trivialized. The "academy" could not understand our alliance with the community and our views on democratizing the university.

One can never put a finger on racism in the United States so we will never know how much the standards issues was a race issue or to what extent the visibility of our African American and Latino student's critical discourse affected the critique of our program. Clearly some of the problems for adult education came from the audacity of our Department Chair to create innovation in highly creative bureaucracy challenging ways. And we as a faculty have to assume responsibility for some of the hostility towards our program because our student load was heavy and not only did we have students who were not impressed with "hoopery" and whom we had to go to the mat for bureaucratically but also we missed warnings of trouble because we were overwhelmed by our own work not keeping watch on the political climate of the university. The escalation of this passive-aggressive opposition by the graduate school turned on memos: What is adult education? Is this topic appropriate for adult education? Who will be on the committee if the student pursues this topic? We learned to put "adult education" into the titles of dissertations or write a memo defending the student's topic at the same time it was submitted.

The graduate school did not question empirical analytical studies on learning or teaching, but studies on "The effect of human capital formation on development in Nigeria," or the "Building of the civil society in Hungary" or "Africentric womanism: the interaction of race, class, gender in adult education" were questioned. Research approaches which were not grounded in the scientific paradigm femused if not shocked some of our colleagues and we were accused of lacking rigor by a few.

On the home front, an uneasy truce was struck between the Human Resource Development (HRD) persons/curriculum and those trying to develop a progressive critique. HRD (and its cousin continuing professional education) laid out the class issues. Working with the poor and undereducated and the development of the critique of workplace education was left up to those wanting to exist on "soft money" and few places for employment. Nationally HRD enveloped graduate programs and the Commission of Professors and we were no exception. Graduate students, including marginalized persons, learned uncritically to: spin a web of double loop learning, empower workers, and sculpt the learning organization. The creation of elaborated discourse for training workers to help industry increase profits and to help the "down sized" or "right sized" workforce increase productivity because the unquestioned norm, we went in business with instructional technology and the business school to developed courses in HRD and HRM (human resource management). At the same time we had some success on the left. We did the seemingly impossible in recruiting marginalized persons into our program. Clearly, race and ethnicity represents only one repressive social construction. But with diversity one does get a dialogue. How well we accomplished this goal is both a function of admissions and graduation. Here are the data on what we accomplished.

What is the role of progressive University gate keepers?

NIU is a second tier institution and by one definition has as its role producing functionaries for the state. However, one could also define NIU as a public university which, in the long tradition of egalitarianism in "American" higher education, is a structure for democratizing education. We chose the latter conceptualization. We admitted on average between 15 and 30 students a year (7 - 47 range) between 1974 and 1996. In 1988, 1989 and 1990 we started three doctoral cohorts. Admission data are shown in Table 1, with the cohort data broken out in 5 year intervals.

TABLE I
Doctoral Student Admissions

5 year Period	Traditional	cohort	Total
1974-78	77	--	77
1979-98	124	--	124
1984-88	103	30	133
1989-93	81	69	150
1994 and 1995	84	0	84(2 years)

The program grew quickly from 1976 forward; we are one of four faculties in one of four departments in the College of Education. In 1978, adult education represented 11% of the department credit hour productions; by 1991, that number increased to 19%; adult education enrolled 43% of the departments majors and awarded 21% or the 107 doctoral degrees from the department in 1991 and has maintained that level of activity (NIU). In 1995, we graduated 15 doctoral students, six of whom were Black and one Asian.

The first African American doctoral student was recruited in 1976 and the first international student in 1978. Each year from 1976 to 1988 (except 1986) one to six U.S. marginalized students were admitted. But it wasn't until the start of the cohorts that this number expanded dramatically (Cunningham, 1991a).

The Role of Innovation

The NIU graduate program in education, according to Smith, the Department Chair is held hostage by seven flawed assumptions perpetrated in the late nineteenth century under the ideal of meritocracy: 1) that the degree will be completed in thirty-six to forty-eight months of fulltime study: 2) that graduate study in education should be and is a fulltime endeavor: 3) that study should commence immediately at the conclusion of the baccalaureate: 4) that a tuition waiver and enough income to pay for a dorm room or equivalent efficiency apartment and monastic food allowance will sustain the three years of study (because candidates will postpone acquiring any dependents until they finish at age twenty-five or twenty-six): 5) that the small number of assistantships available will be sufficient to produce the requisite number of doctoral graduates: 6) that highly qualified candidates can be recruited nationally through such publications as the Chronicle of Higher Education: and 7) that applicants can be screened effectively using the Graduate Record examination (GRE). (Smith, p. 2).

For these reasons, Smith was interested in developing cohort programs with pre-set curricula, group support, a schedule to accommodate the part time student, and place emphasis on leadership and policy studies. Smiths views fit well with some of the adult education faculty who reasoned that group cooperative models of education were more in tune with the cultural proclivities of some marginalized groups, that making programs convenient to the student promoted access for marginalized persons, and developing curricula that was inclusive of a wide spectrum of knowledges promoted a more critical and lively analysis in the classroom. Other faculty chose not to work with the cohorts.

The adult education faculty has sponsored six cohorts: three doctoral, two masters, and one cooperative advanced specialist educational degree (Eds.) with the Education Administration faculty. Data on these groups are shown in Table II.

TABLE II
Adult Education Cohorts

Date Initiated	Degree	Admitted	Marginalized		Completion	
1/88	Alpha/Ed.D	30	5	16%	20	66%
6/88	Omega/Ed.D	32	28	88%	14	44%
8/90	Comm College/Ed.D	40	23	58%	18	45%
1/88	Beta/MSED	25	22	88%	18	72%
9/93	Pop Ed/MSED	25	12	48%	13	46%
5/94	Pilsen/Ed.S	63	53	84%	60	95%

Prior to the cohorts, through traditional programming, the adult education faculty, according to 1990 data, had recruited 16% marginalized and 15% international students among the 178 active doctoral students; in contrast, the three doctoral cohort groups with 87 active students had 64% from marginalized groups. Clearly, the cohorts were an effective way to recruit marginalized persons. The diversity of active students in the doctoral program is shown in Table III, as of May 1996.

TABLE III
Doctoral Student Census by Race/Ethnicity (5/1/96)

Group	Number of Students	% of Students
European American	142	56.5
African American	69	27.0
Latino American	14	5.5
Asian American	4	1.6
Native American	1	.4
International	26	10.0
TOTAL	**256**	**100%**

International students came from 19 countries; Asia: 14 from 7 countries; Africa: 4 from 4 countries; Caribbean: 3 from 3 countries; and one student each from Peru, Chile, Ireland, Germany, and Romania. Thirty eight percent of the students now in the program are students of color. This fact alone changes the dynamics of what goes on in the classroom, what the research agenda becomes, and whose knowledges are a part of the curriculum. NIU has stabilized over the last 5 years at this ratio of about 60% white/40% persons of color; about 10 - 12% international students mostly from developing countries contribute to that 40%. The percentage of non-white and international students from developing countries is uncharacteristically high for U.S. programs.

Was the graduation rate improved by the Cohorts?

In 1990, the graduation rate of students in our traditional program was 30% when one looked at the 464 students admitted over the life of the program as compared to 141 graduated (Cunningham, 1991a). However, 261 (56%) were still active and potentially able to graduate and clearly many had not had time to graduate. Sixty-two students (31%) were inactive and had been dropped from the roster.

In order to make a more realistic analysis, all students admitted between 1976 and 1985 were included in a 1990 analysis, thus allowing a five period for the latest admissions to graduate. The overall graduation rate was 53% but 55% for European Americans, 57% for international students, and 35% each for African and Latino Americans. African Americans in these data took, on average, 6.5 years to complete their program while European Americans took 5.5 or 1 years less. African Americans dropped out at a higher rate(41%) than that of European Americans (18%); the overall attrition rate was 45 students or 21% (Cunningham, 1991a). Cohorts have a stronger retention and graduation rate. Starting in 1988, and for a 6 to 8 year period, as compared

to the ten year period utilized for the traditional students, the cohorts have the following graduation and retention rates as displayed in Table IV.

TABLE IV
(May, 1996) Doctoral Cohort Graduation Rates by Race/Ethnicity

Cohort	#years	Dropped	European	African	Latino	Asian	Native
Alpha	8	3	68%	100%	100%	---	---
Omega	8	5	66%	55%	44%	---	---
CC	6	7	60%	42%	---	---	100%
TOTAL	**---**	**15**	**66%**	**52%**	**47%**	**0%**	**100%**

Fifteen of the original 102 students admitted to the cohorts did not finish the course work (15%) as compared to 21% drop-out from the traditional doctoral program. In Table II we saw that the Alpha has a 66%, Omega 44%, and Community College Cohort 45% graduation rate. Now we can see in Table III the marked improvement of graduation in all ethnic/racial groups in the cohort as compared to traditional students. European Americans went from 55% to 66%; African and Latino Americans went from 35% to 52% and 47% respectively. The snapshot for the traditional students was for a minimum 5 to a maximum 10 years in the program; the cohorts are being assessed in a 6 to 8 year period, yet they show higher rates of graduation in the shorter period.

To summarize the demographic data, we have aspired to be a large program and to be inclusive. We have documented rate and ethnicity; social class is more difficult. We do know that many of our students have working class and a few come from extremely poor families. The issue of feminism surfaced late in the program, about 1990, and is now reflected in the curriculum. The proportion of women increased as the program grew and is now at 59%. In May, 1996, the mean age of doctoral students was 46; about 75% were part time students.

In reflecting on the program, I believe that the "cohort concept" is an appropriate option for democratizing the university and increasing the graduation rate. Size of program is more debatable. Presently, we have a 22 to 1 doctoral student/faculty relationship ratio. This may be too high because of the strain it places on the student/faculty which requires time together and demands on time make it difficult for faculty to work extensively especially with part time commuter students.

In several papers we have described other ways we have tried to develop space for encouraging change (Cunningham, 1991a, 1991b, 1993a, 1993b; Cunningham and Smith). Here is a summary of those activities.

1) to encourage African-Latino (a) cohesiveness and knowledge production through annual student research conferences on their agendas;

2) the addition to the traditional graduate curriculum of sociological, political economy, and policy courses;

3) to explicitly explore gender, race, class interactions in educational process;

4) to strengthen our ties with community based educational organizations which emphasize

education for democratic social change;

5) to encourage student enrollment and formal agreements with progressive adult educators from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean;

6) to promote research which critically examines "development" both in the U.S. and in other countries represented in our student body;

7) to develop institutional partnerships for encouraging education that develops on the edge of social movements within poor and marginalized populations;

8) to provide practical experience within poor communities, utilizing participatory research, study circles, and popular culture;

9) widening the concept of research methodology to interpretive and naturalistic approaches.

Accomplishments and Limitations

In assessing the growth quantatively and qualitatively, Cunningham and Smith divided the graduate program development into 3 periods; Identity Formation (1970-1978), Maturation and Challenges (1979-1987), and Diversity (1988-1993). Throughout these three periods there was a growing effort to open up the ideological structures to a more progressive agenda. This claiming of space was helped in the first ten years by the physical presence in Chicago for it is in the urban areas that diverse racial, ethnic and a more heterogeneous population exists. As the faculty grew, a balance of intellectual and political interests was struck. The dominant discourse over the last ten years has moved from psychology of the learner, continuing professional education, learning to learn, and mentoring to the learning organization, and HRD. Other university graduate programs have shown similar diversification; psychological concerns, including transformational learning, self directed learning, adult development characterize some programs; human resource development is the other major interest and can be found as a substantial part of most U.S. programs. Education concerned with social transformation, includes feminist, anti-heterosexual, anti-racist discourses; cultural contextualization of the American Indian, Asian, African and Latino American experience; critical theory; and depending on the support of one or two faculty members. The number of non-white professors has doubled in the last six years from 7 to 14 out of some 200 who identify with the Commission of Professors. The need for ideological space is there, but the space often closes rapidly as faculty members committed to these values move or retire.

What the NIU program has demonstrated is that if a broad based definition of adult education is a priority among a faculty, one can find professors and students who will be the space makers to foster a counter discourse to the dominant one. However, it is clear that any ideological space that is developed can close as quickly as it opened. It is also clear that the sponsoring institutions, the university and external funders, are not comfortable with power shifts.

A second point relates to African and Latino American recruitment. There are excellent candidates for doctoral study within these marginalized groups when one designs programs that make enrollment possible. Of the 59 African, Native and Latino American doctoral graduates, 8 or 14% have or are in the process of publishing a book; nine have moved into university professor positions.

A third observation is that recruitment of substantial numbers of non-white and progressive students is an excellent way to effectively change the curriculum. This includes the introduction of new content in establishing courses, new courses, more challenging discussion in classes, new cultural perspectives, and the challenging of dominant assumptions. Linkages between marginalized domestic students and international students from the south are common. And these linkages along with the diversity these students bring affect students from the U.S. dominant culture.

A fourth observation is that faculty that reflect marginalized students racial, ethnic, and conceptual diversity bring healthy conflict into the faculty meetings and discussions. Such diversity denys the taken for grantedness of being white or male.

Issues in North American Graduate Education

1. To what degree should a graduate program in adult education focus on their technology?
2. What is the place of critical theory and post-modern thought in a curriculum focused on practice?
3. How do we bring cultural relevance to our curriculum which involves faculty and students from the dominant groups as well as those marginalized?
4. How does one focus on developing a welcoming structure within the university for culturally diverse students and faculty rather than to frame the problem around their alleged deficits.

Our next step at NIU is developing a project which could center and extend our progressive social change agenda. The major conceptual field on which to ground this project would be work, community, and family; the organizing principles would be culture, education and knowledge. The goal is to work towards a new paradigm for the creation of democratic social movements. A culture and education project would provide an intersection of the university with work, community and family. Harts treatise (1992) on work would be one starting point, the partnership of community/university would be another. The conceptual education of graduate students must interface with the political work on the ground in the community; both should benefit. The family is important since it is the first grouping in the civil society and because the family is conceptualized as the center of work. The African-American family is presently under siege; the concept of family is changing and social space is now present to create change.

1. How do we in education, within cultural contexts, create knowledge and knowledge producers? How do we challenge the market as the fundamental value of our culture?
2. Most social critics recognize the limitations of both marxist and free market economies. In addition most educators recognize that the market is driving educational practice. How can we recognize work so that it educates for life? How do we develop cultural norms to center work around the family so that education develops more robustly as learning for life rather than learning for earning.
3. How can intellectuals in the university work with intellectuals in the community to develop a robust civil society through mutual engagement?
4. How can the experiences of the poor in other countries inform and assist our analysis of

the social construction of poverty in the U.S. urban centers? Anti-racist programs? Collective work strategics?

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